

Special and Cross-Cutting Initiatives

USAID's special initiatives and cross-cutting programs portfolio addresses the immediate needs of the country by promoting national and regional stability through unique programs not sufficiently advanced by any other priority goals of the Mission. Some of the activities are complementary to other sector-specific programs, thus ensuring long-term sustainability of the Agency's programs in Bulgaria.

The American University in Bulgaria

Established in 1991, the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) is the only educational institution providing American-style liberal arts education in Southeastern Europe. Its curriculum is designed to foster independence of thought, creative problem solving and effective communication among a diverse student body and a faculty of expatriate and regional experts. AUBG has graduated seven classes of nearly 1,000 individuals, representing more than 20 countries in Southeastern Europe, Western and Central Europe, Central Asia and the United States. Today, 62% of its graduates are employed with international companies and organizations, whereas 34% are in graduate studies at renowned U.S. and European universities. With a 30% international student body, AUBG has demonstrated significant accomplishments for its short 10-year history in promoting democracy, free market economy, and multiethnic tolerance. Recognizing the need for developing a pool of young regional leaders capable of promoting and preserving the values of democracy, USAID has supported AUBG's long-term program to attain financial self-sustainability.

Community Development and Participation Through the Chitalishta Network

To strengthen participatory community development in Bulgaria, USAID has joined forces with UNDP and the Government of the Netherlands in reviving the role of the Bulgarian Chitalishta (cultural centers traditionally involved in arts and education) as catalysts for good local governance and sustainable human development at the grassroots level. The program is targeted at strengthening the capacity for self-sustainability of 300 target chitalishta by expanding and modernizing their role to serve and respond to local community needs. Activities include the development of a national capacity building program, a grant scheme for community development sub-projects; the establishment of internet centers within the chitalishta, a chitalishta portal site and newsletter, and policy support on legislation related to chitalishta development and sustainability.

The Internet Initiative for Economic Development

With Bulgaria being one of the 11 pilot countries that joined the Internet for Economic Development Initiative, USAID has provided support for three Internet-related projects designed to increase public access to information on social and economic topics, promote networking on the national and regional level, and provide access to information and IT education for under-served rural communities. The three components of the program include: 1) creating a



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Bulgaria Economic Portal (www.econ.bg) aimed to provide updated economic information and links to available resources; 2) development of a *South East Europe Civil Society Portal* (www.southeasteurope.online.bg) to serve as a regional civil society forum; and, 3) the establishment of 10 *Public Computer and Communication Centers (Telecenters)* in rural areas with almost no access to communication and information technology. The telecenters will provide educational and customized consulting and information services to target community groups.

Organized Labor Support

The *American Center for International Labor Solidarity* provides educational services and technical assistance to Bulgarian trade unions in the areas of labor education, labor counseling, and tripartite cooperation. The ongoing educational program allows some 1,000 Bulgarian trade union members per month to participate in seminars on collective bargaining, labor law, health and safety, privatization and economic reform, and modern labor management relations. Eight Labor Counseling Centers offer legal, employment, and economic counseling services to union members and interested individuals. The Solidarity Center has also taken the lead in promoting the establishment of an Alternative Dispute Resolution System in Bulgaria facilitating viable dialogue among trade unions, the government, and employers associations.

Early Warning System

Originated in 1997 as a cooperative initiative between USAID, UNDP and Open Society/Bulgaria, the *Early Warning System* is designed to equip Bulgarian policy decision-makers with a tool for crisis prevention and early detection of conflict. Specifically, the system provides updated information to local policy decision-makers on key socio-economic trends and developments. The

information is collected and analyzed on a monthly basis by a team of independent consultants and consolidated into monthly Early Warning Reports disseminated among all governmental institutions, international organizations, national, regional and international think-tanks and NGOs.

USAID FACTS:

- 10 pilot telecenters to be established in underserved rural areas around Bulgaria
- 1,000 union members trained monthly
- \$1 million committed to strengthening a network of 300 chitalishta throughout Bulgaria
- 2 internet portals launched to serve as a regional civil society forum and provide updated information on the Bulgarian economy
- 36 monthly and 3 Annual Early Warning Reports published
- More than 120 students graduate from AUBG annually, majoring in Business Administration, Political Science/International Relations, Computer Science, Economics, Journalism/Mass Communications, European Studies, etc.